



CHRISTIAN GIVING

ILLUSTRATED AND ENFORCED

BY

ANCIENT TITHING.


*A Discourse Preached in St. Paul's Church, Montreal,
on Sunday Morning, Feb. 13, 1881,*

BY

JOHN JENKINS, D.D., LL.D.

MONTREAL :

MITCHELL & WILSON, PRINTERS, ST. PETER STREET.



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This Discourse was preached on occasion of the distribution amongst the members of St. Paul's Church, of the Schedules of Contribution, for the current year, towards the Missionary and other Benevolent work of the Presbyterian Church in Canada—the Author deeming it a favourable opportunity for enunciating to his hearers, the principles and modes of Christian giving, as set forth in the Old and New Testaments.

An old friend of the Author, and of the Congregation, came to him at the close of the service, and generously sought permission to print the Discourse at his own expense : Hence its publication.

ST. PAUL'S CHURCH, MONTREAL,
13th February, 1881.

CHRISTIAN GIVING

ILLUSTRATED AND ENFORCED BY ANCIENT TITHING.

"Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed Me.
But ye say, wherein have we robbed Thee?
In tithes and offerings."

Malachi iii. 8.

Antiquity imparts great interest to any custom; it also invests it with a measure of authority. If you are able to add to antiquity wide-spread assent, you may claim for the custom or institution, a yet larger interest, and a yet higher authority.

For the payment of tithes as a sacred offering, you have very high antiquity. Confining your attention, for a moment, to the Biblical record, you are carried back to the time of Abraham, who took a tenth of the spoils which he had recovered during a successful war, and offered it to the service of religion and of "the Most High God," in the person of Melchisedec, a royal priest. Jacob must have learned from his grandfather, whom he often saw, and from others, that giving unto the Lord a tenth of one's possessions, was a recognized religious duty. You remember his vow, after his heart had been cheered on his sad and solitary journey towards Laban, by the vision of the glorious ladder: "If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat and raiment to put on, so that I come again to my father's house in peace; then shall the Lord be my God; and this stone, which I have set for a pillar shall be God's house; AND OF ALL THAT THOU SHALT GIVE ME, I WILL SURELY GIVE THE TENTH UNTO THEE."

But we have other testimony no less ancient, in proof of the application of a tenth of their possessions by mankind to sacred and other public purposes. The practice prevailed amongst the Carthaginians, the Arabians, the Greeks, the Romans, and even earlier nations. These peoples were accustomed to bestow a tenth of spoils captured in war, on a successful general. A tenth, too, of commercial profits was sometimes dedicated to a particular Deity. At other times, a king was the chosen recipient of a tenth of the property of certain of his subjects. Abraham, therefore, in paying tithes to Melchisedec, was but following a custom which existed in the nations around him ; the result, no doubt, of some common tradition. Indeed, the offering to religion of money, of the fruits of the field, and of the increase of the flock, may be said to be instinctive in the human race ; to be, as some would prefer to express it, a principle of natural religion. There never was a time in which men did not recognize the responsibility of acknowledging by religious gifts, the Kingship and bounty of the Creator ; neither was there ever a nation or people so ignorant or debased, as not in some form or other, often rude and even savage, to surrender to the ends of what they called religion, a portion of their substance. Long before Solomon reduced it to words, the principle embodied in this requirement was recognized by the universal human mind : " Honour the Lord with thy substance, and with the first fruits of all thine increase."

The legislation of Moses elaborated this ancient practice, impressing it not only with a Divine sanction, but also with a fixed proportionate distribution. That which had previously been somewhat elastic in its operation, became under Moses, compulsory—a *law*, to transgress which was to sin against the God of Israel. Tithes under the Levitical dispensation constituted the one source of ecclesiastical finance. From the tenths of the people, the elaborate and costly sacerdotal system of the Jews, including the whole machinery of its gorgeous temple-worship, was maintained. From a like source, the poor of the nation were provided for. One-tenth did not suffice for both these objects ; so two-tenths were devoted by the Jews, under Divine direction, to religious purposes.

There are writers who contend, with some ground, that a *third* tenth was called for every three years. Be this as it may, it is beyond question that two whole tenths were yearly surrendered to religious objects by every Jew who kept the law of his God. I go not into the details of the Mosaic institution of tithes. They are set forth with great precision of statement; and the institution is so often referred to as divinely appointed, by both Jewish historian and prophet, and is so clearly recognized by Christ Himself and by leading apostles, that no one doubts, or could doubt, either the antiquity of tithe paying, or its authority as an ordinance of God.

You would expect to find some great principle underlying a system thus prevalent in the earliest times, a system adapted and elaborated afterwards by Moses under Divine guidance, for the support of that religious economy which was designed to become, which did become, and is destined yet more signally to become, the light of the Gentile nations, no less than the glory of God's people, Israel. *This is the principle*: That the Creator claims and holds, as his undoubted possession, all that He has made. That which man has, uses, lives by, is the Lord's. Forcibly and with great clearness is this claim stated by one of the psalmists. Speaking as the mouth-piece of Jehovah he says: "Every beast of the forest is mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills . . . the world is mine, and the fulness thereof." Moses, too, lays down the same broad claim on behalf of the Most High: "Behold the heaven and the heaven of heavens is the Lord's thy God, the earth also, with all that therein is." This is *felt* to be true; so felt that it need not be argued. Every man feels that he is not his own; that he has not absolute control of his own movements; that his possessions are not absolutely in his power; that life and health and riches are in the hands of a higher power, placed utterly beyond his own ordering. There does exist, and God allows it to exist, a certain sense of security as to these things; hope and trust are not altogether driven out of the soul, as to the possessions and joys of the present; but after all, when man scrutinizes the whole matter, and applies the doctrine of probabilities to the experience which he has acquired, he feels

that the things which he holds are held under sufferance, that a personal Power is near him which has them so far under control that it is only for It to will, and the whole possession, whatever it be, is gone. Even an atheist feels this, though he would express it differently. The experience of Job is often repeated in the history of mankind. An unseen hand is stretched forth, and at its touch, the most stable and trusted possessions vanish. When health fails and strength forsakes us, when wealth takes to itself wings and loved ones die, the lesson, "Ye are not your own," is easily learned. An early recognition by mankind of this fact—as early, I believe, as the earliest human period—take for example the offerings of Cain and of Abel—led, no doubt, to the custom whose origin we have been attempting to trace and to portray.

In the theocracy of which Moses was the visible representative, God claims, under legal sanctions as we have seen, a recognition of His proprietorship in all that man enjoys, to the extent of one-fifth of his possessions. It matters not to explain at this time how the tithing in Israel was accomplished, by what process it was brought together and used for sacred purposes. Enough for us to know, that a double tithe was enforced, and that failure to pay was visited with punishment. This is set forth with great clearness in the chapter before us. Here is a strong appeal to the chosen people to return from neglect to observance, in the matter of paying tithes. "Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in Mine house, and prove Me now herewith, saith the Lord of Hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it."

It should be remembered, that besides these two compulsory tenths, the Israelites were called upon, not unfrequently, for free-will offerings to the purposes of religion. We have a minute and graphic account in the Book of Exodus of the donations which were devoted by the congregation of Israel towards the setting up of the Tabernacle with its elaborate and costly ornaments. Women brought their jewels of gold, their embroidery, their fine linen. Men brought gold and silver, brass and iron, shittim wood and furs. Both women

and men offered their handywork. No constraint was put upon the people: "Whosoever is of a willing heart, let him bring it," was the language of Moses. Any member of the congregation might decline. It is not said that any one *did* withdraw his sympathy and service from the work. Rather we are told that the "children of Israel brought a willing offering unto the Lord, every man and woman, whose heart made them willing to bring, for all manner of work which the Lord had commanded to be made." The work went on; the interest of the people in its prosecution deepened; "they brought free offerings every morning." And now, look at the issue of this noble and sustained generosity! I will give it in the language of the historian: "The wise men that wrought all the work, came unto Moses and said, 'The people bring much more than enough.' And Moses gave commandment and they caused it to be proclaimed throughout the camp, saying, 'Let neither man nor woman make any more work for the offering of the sanctuary,' so the people were restrained from bringing." Has such a scene as this been ever witnessed under the Christian *regime*? Not among ourselves certainly!

As Israel, in the course of centuries, acquired wealth and stability, the result of successful wars upon the nations whom they disinherited, their free-will offerings to God were on a more liberal scale. Probably there never has been so signal an example of the consecration of money to religious purposes as that which was given for the building of "Solomon's temple." David's personal contribution was upwards of fifteen millions of pounds sterling; and the princes and heads of the nation offered as their free-will gifts more than twice this sum. These two amounts were over and above an almost fabulous hoard which David had for a long time been sacredly treasuring up for this purpose, and which he handed over to Solomon, chosen of God, to carry out the stupendous work. Touching and instructive are the exclamations which these splendid gifts called forth from the mouth of David: "Now, therefore, our God, we thank Thee and praise Thy glorious name. But who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able to offer so willingly after this sort? for all things come of Thee, and of thine own have we given Thee."

What relation has the old Jewish method of giving for religious objects, to the Gospel and Christianity? Is there any correspondence between what was required from Jews, and what is required from Christians in this matter of devoting money or other possessions to God—His cause and Church?

In regard to the general principle of giving, the same law obtains under both Economies. You would expect that the broader and more generous system which succeeded and in a great degree supplanted that of Moses, would not fall behind in consideration and help for the poor. I am sure, too, it would surprise you if the New Testament made no such provision for the maintenance of those who preach the Gospel, as was made by Moses, under Divine direction, for the support of the Jewish priesthood. You have both these provisions in the Gospel, as we shall immediately see; but they are set forth in a broader and more generous light, as you might expect;—transfigured into the loving image of Jesus. The appeals are not less strong, but they come to us on grounds which were unknown to the law. In the Old Testament the appeal is made on the ground of the will of God and of His bounty as the Author of all; the enforcement rests largely upon law—rigid, necessary law—to break which would be sin. The Gospel is not less arbitrary and insistent in its requirements respecting the giving of money; but it sets forth its appeals on the ground of that supreme Example of unselfishness and sacrifice, which Christians have continually before their eyes in the Person and work of their Lord. The measure, no less than the ground, of giving under the Gospel, is the Great Sacrifice: “Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that ye through His poverty might be rich”:—He made Himself poor for you; make ye yourselves poor for others! The religion of the Gospel is represented, from first to last, as a religion of self-denial and of sympathy. To express it in a single phrase, it is “The imitation of Christ.” The requirements enforced by Christ on His disciples are largely and specifically in the direction of surrendering money or other material acquisition, for the great ends of relieving human suffering and saving human souls. In His

teaching He dealt in general principles in the important matter of the use of money. He also gave a distinct commendatory sanction to the payment of tithes. Taking the second, first : In the course of His instructions to the Pharisees, Christ charges them with neglecting the great duties of justice, mercy and faith, acknowledging that they, at the same time, observed with exemplary minuteness, the payment of tithes. "These ought ye to have done," He added, "and not to leave the other undone." It could hardly be said, in view of this statement, that the Gospel abrogates the system of tithe-paying. Rather it develops those great principles of generosity and kindness that underlie the ancient practice, creating a wider sphere for the exercise of benevolent giving, multiplying opportunities for the bestowal of free-will offerings, and connecting them with higher and more sacred sanctions. So far from abrogating, it imparts new and higher authority to the old custom, sets it in a stronger and diviner light.

Then, looking at the general principles which our Lord has laid down as to the stewardship and use of money, the only conclusion we can reach is, that He intended to establish in His Church and amongst His disciples a broader system than that of Moses. Christianity, as He taught it, is designed to strike at the root of covetousness in man—that damning sin, and to overthrow the power of selfishness in the soul—that unholy principle which banishes from its domain the presence and power of holy love. Very early in His ministry, He gave this warning to His hearers, "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven." "Beware of covetousness," said He, at another time, "for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth." He who commanded the rich ruler to cure himself of covetousness by going and selling all that he had and giving it to the poor, and commended another rich man for pledging himself to give a whole half of his property to the poor, and to quadruple any sums that he may have wronged people of, can hardly be quoted as regarding with disfavour that more limited tithe-paying which Moses

had engrafted upon the Levitical system from an ancient stock. Then, look at the extent of the requirements which the Master made upon the self-denial of His personal disciples. He encouraged them to give up "all" for His sake. He did more. He stipulated that if they would become His disciples, they must really do this. Houses and lands, kindred and friends were not to be considered in the great question of following Him and of saving the soul. Look, too, at those striking parables which He pronounced against covetousness. The rich man in torment and the beggar in Abraham's bosom. The hoarder of all the wealth needed for years, fool that he was! suddenly summoned into the presence of his God. You cannot help feeling as you read the Gospels, that their whole spirit, that the tone of all the teaching of our Lord, and the influence of His example, are not only in full harmony with, but that they go far beyond the most generous and self-denying requirements of the older economy, whether you regard it as enjoining upon its members a double tithe, or view it in that higher, freer light which was imparted to it by the oft-times more-than-lavish free-will offerings of the congregation of Israel.

Such was the spirit of the Lord's teaching, example and demands. The results were seen when once the Church was established. The multitudes of converts who were brought into Christian communion, as the fruit of the Pentecostal blessing, belonged to various classes of society. For the most part they were poor. Their new circumstances gave them little opportunity for securing employment. Many of them were strangers in Jerusalem. So the apostles found themselves surrounded by a large number of converts, absolutely needy: not a hundred or two; but fifteen hundred, or most likely two thousand. Already in their Christian history, these babes in Christ felt united one to another by a common bond—that grace which in common they had received from and in the Lord Jesus Christ. Those who had, and many of them seem to have had "possessions," sold them, and brought the proceeds and laid them at the feet of the Apostles, who distributed as every man had need. It does not mean, I think, that they all

gave up everything they had, but that they gave up whatever was needed for an adequate common supply. Neither is it stated that any of the converts were constrained to give of their property against their will. It was a pure voluntary offering to the necessities of their poorer brethren. This is clear from the striking story of Ananias and his wife. Peter's remonstrance with Ananias contained this appeal: "Whilst it remained, was it not thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power?"—No pressure, therefore, was put upon any man.

Thus the Church, from the day of its birth, was called to the exercise of self-sacrificing benevolence. That which was as dear to its members, as the possessions which we have gathered are to us, was surrendered—willingly, yea, joyfully given up, "Neither said any of them that aught of the things which he possessed was his own;" a higher, nobler view of property was taken by these early converts in the freshness of their love; nothing was felt to be their own; they did not even feel that they themselves were their own. The Church, the body of Christ in its members, claimed all they had and all they were; and it was all given! This was the "*grace*" of giving. It is worth while to note, that this readiness to surrender all, was the fruit of prayer and of the bestowment of the Holy Ghost. The Apostles and converts (not all of the latter, for they could hardly have found, even in Jerusalem, a place in which all could meet) came together for communion and prayer. "When they had prayed," it is said, "the place was shaken where they had assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness. And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul, neither said any of them that aught of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common."

Shortly after this, as the number of the disciples increased, we find the Church making provision for those of its poorer members who were widows, and electing seven deacons, at the instance of the Apostles, to take charge of the contributions, and to make an equitable daily ministration;—showing

that the Christians kept up their willingness to contribute of their substance to the Church of God. The contributions and outlay must have been considerable to have needed the superintendence of seven efficient officers.

The Epistles to Philippi and Corinth contain many references to the liberality of the churches in those cities; those to the Corinthians especially, announce the great *principles* of giving, as deduced from the Gospel; and the true *method*.

Two objects of Christian giving are specially named. They are the two to which the double-tithe of the Israelites was set apart: That of supporting the Lord's ministry, and that of supplying the wants of the needy members of the Church. The second object occupies the larger space in the New Testament—the peculiar circumstances of the Church calling for large and immediate attention to the poor. But that of the support of Christian teachers is enunciated with more than sufficient clearness: "Let him that is taught in the word communicate unto him that teacheth in all good things." "If we have sown unto you spiritual things, is it a great thing if we shall reap your carnal things?" And here I want you to observe how the Apostle draws an illustrative argument from the custom of tithes, to strengthen his position as to the support of the Christian ministry: "Do ye not know," he argues, "that they which minister about holy things live of the things of the temple? and they which wait at the altar are partakers with the altar? Even so," is his triumphant conclusion, "hath the Lord ordained, that they which preach the Gospel, should live of the Gospel."

From this, the duty of sustaining missions to the heathen is easily deducible. Indeed, what were those early churches but churches planted in the midst of heathenism? and what were those preachers of the Gospel, for whose support St. Paul pleads, but missionaries to the heathen? and how are we to carry out the Lord's injunction to go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature, if we do not make provision for the support of those who in the ends of the earth are now fulfilling this great commission?

To two of the Churches—probably to others, but we

know of two—the Apostle laid down the principle of Christian giving as to its manner and as to its measure: "Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given order to the Churches of Galatia, even so do ye. Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him."

There is to be system in our giving. It is to be at regular intervals. The Apostle suggests a weekly interval. And doubtless for most people this would be the wise plan. All who are salaried—workmen, servants, clerks, and the higher class of salaried officials, receiving their pay weekly or monthly, can have no difficulty in laying aside a portion of their earnings for religious purposes every Lord's day. One advantage of this method would be, that it would give people a habit of regularity;—systematic in this, they would be likely to be systematic in other matters. There is another advantage: it is easier to contribute, by small offerings, than to be called upon at the end of a year, when all one's money is spent, for the aggregate of these small sums. Still another advantage appears: the certainty with which the Church could rely upon the money needed for the support of its missions and other objects.

In regard to those whose income is derived from the profits of their business, the best way probably would be for them to make their calculation upon what they made in the previous year, together with what it cost them to live. This latter is a very necessary element in the calculation. It would be unequal for a merchant to lay by a proportion of his profits, not including what he has spent on his family, and for a man with a salary merely, to give a proportion of his whole income.

Some of the leading Congregations in our Church have adopted the Lord's-Day weekly offering as the principal means of supporting their own Society and the Church's Missions: There are no pew rents; the offerings are all voluntary. I wish we could see our way to the adoption of the same method. I wonder what would be the result of throwing ourselves on the generosity of our people! Would they be faithful? would they be as liberal in free-will offerings, as they are constrained to be on the far from satisfactory pew-rent system?

So far as the benevolent work of the Church is concerned, this Congregation is making an *approach* to systematic giving. The Schedule system enables any member of the congregation to set apart a monthly, a quarterly, or an annual sum to the work of the Lord. But that which depresses me most of all in the position of this Church, I will not say before you but before God, is the fact to which I now call your solemn attention, that many among us, as you know, give nothing to Missions whether Home or Foreign. The principal offerings of the Congregation are confined to the immediate care and sustentation of itself. Listen to the Apostle's direction, and note its universality: "Upon the first day of the week *let every one of you* lay by him," the poor no less than the rich, the young as well as the old. No provision is made for exceptions. The duty is common to all; and the Apostle's words can be construed to mean no less than that for any man to withhold from giving, is to forfeit his claim to be a Christian.

The measure of one's giving is to be determined by his prosperity. The proportion of a tenth or two-tenths is not stated. But no man will have the boldness or the indiscretion to plead a lower proportion under the gloriously-generous and loving Gospel, than that which existed under the law! This would be an outrageous contention. It would be dishonest for any one of us to plead, as an excuse for not giving up to the Jewish standard, that the Gospel does not actually prescribe a proportion. This would be to rob God, certainly! "Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed Me."

"As God hath prospered him"! We can easily reckon up this matter as to the past. Have we given in proportion to our past prosperity? We know what we have done; how we have succeeded; what we have made. We know how much we have added, from year to year, notwithstanding all that we have spent and lost, to our capital; how, beginning with nothing or with next to nothing, we have worked ourselves up to a position of opulence in some cases, aye, in many cases. What have we done in the matter of giving? Did we ever sit down and set apart a fifth of a year's profits and distribute it in Christian work and charity? Did we ever, when

we reached a capital of fifty thousand dollars, sit down and tithe it? or when we reached a capital of one hundred thousand sit down and give even a tenth of this? "Of *all* that thou shalt give me I will surely give the tenth unto Thee." There were years in which many of you made ten thousand dollars, others fifteen, twenty, forty, fifty thousand. Who helped you to make it? And yet you kept nearly all of it! "Will a man rob God?" I will not throw such a slight on your intelligence and your conscience as to argue with you that a man with twenty thousand dollars a year contributing a tenth, does not give as much or in as Christian a proportion, as a man who out of an income of two thousand dollars gives two hundred. A tenth for the wealthier man, is no sufficient proportion, if a tenth is the true gauge for the poorer man. Others, too, among you, can review the past. Your salaries increased from six dollars a month to eight or ten, or from five hundred dollars a year to six hundred, or from a thousand to fifteen hundred, and so on. Did you increase your giving? I say not in amount, but *in proportion to the increase* in your income? If you used to give fifty dollars out of five hundred, the setting apart five hundred out of five thousand could not be called giving in sufficient proportion. Certainly it would not be laying by in store, *as God prospered you*.

These hints and principles I commend to the earnest and intelligent consideration of every member of St. Paul's Church. It is no light thing for any Christian communicant to neglect to do the will of God in this matter. Let every man do his duty—his Christ-commanded, self-sacrificing, Christ-like duty. I counsel the young, especially the young men who are entering or have lately entered upon life, to begin this work of faithful, proportionate giving. Be not ye of the number of those in the Church who "rob God." Listen rather to these words of ancient wisdom, "Honour the Lord with thy substance, and with the first fruits of all thine increase; so shall thy barns be filled with plenty, and thy presses shall burst out with new wine." Here is the command distinctly stated! Here, too, is the promise! Obey ye the one; and the God of all plenty will fulfil the other.—"The first-fruits of *all* thine

increase."—What is this but saying, Honour Him as He hath prospered you! Do this faithfully—as faithfully as you pay your debts. This is a debt: Pay it! Let not this word fall from the mouth of God concerning you, "Ye have robbed Me!"—robbed Me "in tithes and offerings!" Do it on system: as systematically as you keep your account books in bank or warehouse. May God help you to do it! May He help us all to understand the "grace" of giving, and to practice it! Be assured that as in husbandry, so also in this matter of the stewardship of our possessions, "There is that scattereth and yet increaseth; there is that withholdeth more than is meet, and it tendeth to poverty." Often have I observed the truth of these two principles of action, with their following results, illustrated in the experience of mankind. I have met with men who have sown comparatively nothing for God, who have kept their abundance hoarded and unused, save for their own gratification; and they have reaped neither pleasure nor gain. On the other hand, I have seen and known men who have scattered their acquisitions with profuse hand for the relief of the needy and the lost, and it seemed as if the more they gave, the more they were prospered. "He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully: Every man as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loveth a cheerful giver."

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